

Russia, Ukraine Swap POWs

Brazil's Lula Raises Russia War Mediation With China, UAE



UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI (AFP/AP) – Brazil's president on Sunday said he had discussed joint mediation for Russia's war in Ukraine with China and the United Arab Emirates, accusing the United States and Europe of prolonging the conflict.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who was wrapping up an official visit to China and the UAE after returning for a third term in office, said the two countries and others should join a "political G20" to try to end the war.

The veteran leftist also remarked that the war was caused "by decisions made by two countries".

"President Putin doesn't take any initiatives to stop the war. (President Volodymyr) Zelensky from Ukraine doesn't take any initiatives to stop the war," Lula, speaking through an official translator, told reporters in Abu Dhabi.

"Europe and the U.S. continue to give their way of contribution to

continue the war. So they have to sit around the table and say, 'That's enough'."

While in China, Lula accused Washington of "encouraging" the war by supplying weapons to Ukraine.

He also lashed out at the dollar's dominance in global trade, calling for a new currency for transactions between the BRICS countries -- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

The 77-year-old said he spoke to UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Chinese President Xi Jinping, about forming a group of countries to mediate, styled after the G20 group of advanced economies.

"The G20 was formed to bail out the (world) economy that was in crisis," Lula said.

"Now it's important to create another kind of G20 to end this war and establish peace. This is my intent and I think that we'll manage to have great

success. "Yesterday (Saturday) I talked to the sheikh about the war. I talked to Xi Jinping about the war. And I think that we're meeting a set of people that prefer to talk about peace than war. And so I think we're going to have success."

Lula said he had already discussed his initiative with U.S. President Joe Biden, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron and the leaders of some South American countries.

Unlike Western powers, neither China nor Brazil has imposed sanctions against Moscow over Russia's February 2022 attack on Ukraine. The UAE has maintained a neutral stance in the conflict.

As for the development on the ground in the Ukraine war, more than 100 Ukrainian prisoners of war have been released as part of a major Easter exchange with Russia, a top official said Sunday, as Orthodox Ukrainians marked the holiday for a second time since last February.

Celebrations were subdued due to security risks, with a curfew barring the faithful from customary all-night services.

Presidential adviser Andriy Yermak announced that 130 soldiers, sailors, border guards and others captured by Moscow were on their way back home following a "big Easter prisoner exchange."

There was no immediate information on how many Russian prisoners were released, but the press service of the founder of the Wagner Group also released a video Sunday showing Ukrainian prisoners of war being readied for an exchange.

Union Leader: UK Nurses Prepared to Strike Until Christmas



NHS nurses and other medical workers strike over pay, in London

LONDON (AFP) – Nurses in Britain are prepared to strike until Christmas if they cannot reach a deal with the government on pay, the leader of the country's main nursing union said on Sunday.

Members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) would strike at the end of April and the beginning of May before holding a ballot on continuing the strike to the end of the year, union leader Pat Cullen said.

"If that ballot is successful it will mean further strike action right up until Christmas," Cullen told the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg program.

Members of the union rejected a government pay offer on Friday and immediately announced an escalation in strike action.

Hopes had been high that nurses in England would accept the five percent pay offer brokered by the RCN and the government in March.

But after putting the offer to its members, the RCN said 54 percent turned it down.

RCN members will walk out for 48 hours from 8:00 pm (1900 GMT) on April 30, with the action extended to staff in emergency departments, intensive care and cancer care units for

the first time.

The refusal is a setback for the government, which had hoped for an end to the crippling health sector strike that has seen thousands of operations and appointments cancelled.

Hospital doctors below consultant level have this week been on a four-day strike demanding better pay and conditions.

Cullen said she had received a letter from Health Secretary Steve Barclay on Sunday morning after requesting talks with him about the pay offer last week.

RCN members walked out for the first time in the union's 108-year history late last year, joining a wave of public and private sector workers calling for pay rises as inflation soared.

The government said the RCN rejection of the pay offer was "hugely disappointing" and said it was "fair and generous".

As well as a five percent pay increase in the next financial year, the offer included a one-off bonus worth at least £1,250 (\$1,510) per person.

Two other unions representing healthcare workers have yet to announce the results of their ballot on the offer.

Report Finds Democracy for Black Americans Under Attack

WASHINGTON (AP) – Extreme views adopted by some local, state and federal political leaders who try to limit what history can be taught in schools and seek to undermine how Black officials perform their jobs are among the top threats to democracy for Black Americans, the National Urban League says.

Marc Morial, the former New Orleans mayor who leads the civil rights and urban advocacy organization, cited the most recent example: the vote this month by the Republican-controlled Tennessee House to oust two Black representatives for violating a legislative rule. The pair had participated in a gun control protest inside the chamber after the shooting that killed three students and three staff members at a Nashville school.

"We have censorship and Black history suppression, and now this," Morial said in an interview. "It's another piece of fruit of the same poisonous tree, the effort to suppress and contain."

Both Tennessee lawmakers were quickly reinstated by leaders in their districts and were back at work in the House after an uproar that spread well beyond the state.

The Urban League's annual State of Black America report draws on data and surveys from a number of organizations, including the UCLA Law School, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League. The collective findings reveal an increase in recent years in hate crimes and efforts to change classroom curriculums, attempts to make voting more difficult and extremist views being normalized in politics, the military and law enforce-

ment.

One of the most prominent areas examined is so-called critical race theory. Scholars developed it as an academic framework during the 1970s and 1980s in response to what they viewed as a lack of racial progress following the civil rights legislation of the 1960s. The theory centers on the idea that racism is systemic in the nation's institutions and that they function to maintain the dominance of white people in society.

Director Taifha Alexander said the Forward Tracking Project, part of the UCLA Law School, began in response to the backlash that followed the protests of the George Floyd killing in 2020 and an executive order that year from then-President Donald Trump restricting diversity training.

The project's website shows that 209 local, state and federal government entities have introduced more than 670 bills, resolutions, executive orders, opinion letters, statements and other measures against critical race theory since September 2020.

In many ways, the report mirrors concerns evident in recent years in a country deeply divided over everything from how much students should be taught about racism and sexuality to the legitimacy of the 2020 election.

Data released this year by the FBI indicated that hate crimes rose between 2020 and 2021. African Americans were disproportionately represented, accounting for 30% of the incidents in which the bias was known.

By comparison, the second largest racial group targeted in the single incident category was white victims, who made up 10%.



BERLIN (Dispatches) – Supporters of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party have held a rally in Nuremberg to protest against their government's financial and military aid to Ukraine amid war with Russia, calling for peace in their continent. "We want peace with all peoples in Europe, which includes Russia as well as Ukraine. We also want to live peacefully in Europe with Russia in the future," Tino Chrupalla, AfD party co-leader stated at the rally. Footage of the protest show the crowd waving flags and holding banners and placards reading 'No to German participation in the war' and 'Ami go home!' among others. Some protesters also carried placards and flags with doves of peace, along with Germany and party flags. "As the only party, we say unanimously and clearly diplomacy instead of arms deliveries. The arms shipments must stop and diplomacy must finally take place. That must be the goal, after a year of bloodshed," Chrupalla added. Talking to the crowd, deputy leader of the party, Peter Boehringer, mentioned that in the case of a world war, you don't even accept a 0.5 percent risk probability, so "Let's not allow even small misunderstandings to trigger a major war, even nuclear war under certain circumstances."

NEW DELHI (AP) – A former Indian lawmaker convicted of kidnapping and facing murder and assault charges was shot dead along with his brother in a dramatic attack that was caught live on TV in northern India, officials said Sunday. Atiq Ahmad and his brother, Ashraf Ahmad, were under police escort on their way to a medical checkup at a hospital on Saturday night when three men posing as journalists targeted the two brothers from close range in Prayagraj city in Uttar Pradesh state. The men quickly surrendered to the police after the shooting, with at least one of them chanting "Jai Shri Ram" or "Hail Lord Ram," a slogan that has become a battle cry for Hindu nationalists. Uttar Pradesh is governed by India's ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. Police officer Ramji Sharma said the three assailants came on motorcycles posing as journalists. "They managed to reach close to Atiq and his brother on the pretext of recording a byte and fired at them from close range. Both sustained bullet injuries on the head," he said. "It all happened in seconds," Sharma said.

GUAYAQUIL (AFP) – At least 12 inmates were killed in clashes that broke out in a prison in the Ecuadorian port of Guayaquil, the prosecutor's office said, the latest deadly violence to rock the city's penitentiary system. The dozen inmate deaths occurred after a bloody confrontation erupted Friday – part of a spate of brutality that began when six detainees were found hanged in the same prison and three female guards were killed earlier in the week. Ecuadorian prisons are the scene of recurrent massacres between prisoners, against a backdrop of rivalry between criminal groups fighting for control of lucrative drug trafficking. "An investigation has been opened to identify those responsible for the death of 12 inmates from the Litoral Penitentiary," which is also known as Guayas 1, the prosecutor's office said, adding that the bodies had bullet wounds. The country's main port on the Pacific coast, Guayaquil has in recent years become the epicenter of drug trafficking in Ecuador, located between Colombia and Peru -- the world's main cocaine producers. Since February 2021, eight massacres have been recorded in these prisons, with more than 400 prisoners killed, most of them dismembered and burned.

MEXICO CITY (Reuters) – Armed men on Saturday killed a child and six others after storming a resort in the central Mexican state of Guanajuato, authorities said, in a region increasingly plagued by drug cartel violence. Footage widely shared on social media showed the aftermath of the attack in a palm-studded resort in the small town of Cortazar, about 65 km (40 miles) south of the Guanajuato city. It was not clear who was behind the shooting that killed the seven-year-old, three men and three women. Cortazar's local security department said. One person was seriously injured in the La Palma resort. But in recent years rival drug cartels have been waging brutal battles to control territory and trafficking routes through the state. Video taken soon after the attack showed shocked adults and children walking past piles of dead bodies near a swimming pool.

HELSINKI (AFP) – Hours after Germany closed out its atomic era by turning off its last three nuclear reactors, the largest single reactor in Europe entered regular production in Finland, its operator said Sunday. The next-generation Olkiluoto 3, now producing around 14 percent of the country's electricity, is expected to remain operational for "at least the next 60 years", according to the site's operator TVO. Germany meanwhile officially ended decades of nuclear energy use by turning off its last three nuclear reactors on Saturday. The Isar 2 reactor in the southeast of the country, the Neckarwestheim facility in the southwest and Ennsland in the northwest were disconnected from the electricity network before midnight. Europe's largest economy had been looking to leave behind nuclear power since 2002, but the phase-out was accelerated by former chancellor Angela Merkel in 2011 after the meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan.

SEOUL (Reuters) – A South Korean Navy vessel fired warning shots to drive out a North Korean patrol boat that crossed the western de facto maritime border last week, the South's military said Sunday. The North Korean boat crossed the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in waters northeast of South Korea's Baengnyeong Island in the Yellow Sea on Saturday at 11 a.m., prompting the South Korean Navy to dispatch its Chamsuri-class patrol boat, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Yonhap news agency reported. After the North's boat remained unresponsive to South Korea's warning broadcasts and communication attempts, the South Korean vessel fired 10 warning shots with its autocannon and made the North Korean boat retreat. The North Korean boat made the incursion as it was chasing a Chinese fishing boat, according to an informed source.

Thousands Turn Out for Anti-Government Protest in Prague

PRAGUE (AP) – Thousands of people rallied again in the Czech capital on Sunday to protest high inflation and demand the government's resignation.

It was the second such rally at Prague's Wenceslas Square after one on March 11 that was organized by a new political party known as PRO under an "against the poverty" banner.

The demonstrators, speakers at the protest and the head of the populist group, Jindrich Rajchl, blamed the European Union and the Czech government for soaring inflation and all repeatedly called on the current five-party coalition to resign.

"We want the government's resignation," Rajchl told the crowd. Rajchl, a lawyer by profession, is the former deputy head of the Czech soccer association.

"Resign, resign," the protesters chanted.

"We're here to stand by our country," Rajchl said.

His group, whose name in English stands for Law, Respect, Expertise has no seats in parliament.

Rajchl claimed his group was ready to further escalate the protests.

Inflation has been high but on



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the decline in recent months, dropping to 15% in March, down from 16.7% in February and 17.5% the month before.

The protesters also want the Czech government to stop taking actions that are intended to reduce misinformation and fake news.

The protesters denounced the government's stance in Russia's war against Ukraine.

The Czech Republic has staunchly supported the government in Kyiv since the war on Ukraine. The

country has provided weapons for the Ukrainian military and taken in about 500,000 refugees.

Rajchl called Defense Minister Jiri Cernochova, a vocal supporter of the pro-Ukraine stance, "the biggest security risk for our country."

Some people at the rally were signing a petition demanding the country quits NATO.

Protesters were planning to march to the government office later Sunday. Prime Minister Petr Fiala is currently on a trip to Asia.

G7 Ministers Set New Targets for Solar, Wind Capacity

SAPPORO, Japan (Reuters) – The Group of Seven rich nations on Sunday set big new collective targets for solar power and offshore wind capacity, agreeing to speed up renewable energy development and move toward a quicker phase-out of fossil fuels.

But they stopped short of endorsing a 2030 deadline for phasing out coal that Canada and other members had pushed for, and left the door open for continued investment in gas, saying that sector could help address potential energy shortfalls.

"In the midst of an unprecedented energy crisis, it's important to come up with measures to tackle climate change and promote energy security at the same time," Japanese industry minister Yasutoshi Nishimura told a news conference.

"While acknowledging that there are diverse pathways to achieve carbon neutral, we agreed on the importance of aiming for a common goal toward 2050," he said.

G7 ministers finish two days of meetings on climate, energy and environmental policy in the northern Japanese city of Sapporo on Sunday. Renewable fuel sources and energy security have taken on a new urgency following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"Initially people thought that climate action and action on energy security potentially were in conflict. But discussions which we had and which are reflected in the communicate are that they actually work together," said Jonathan Wilkinson, Canada's minister of natu-

ral resources.

In their communique, the members pledged to collectively increase offshore wind capacity by 150 gigawatts by 2030 and solar capacity to more than 1 terawatt.

They agreed to accelerate "the phase-out of unabated fossil fuels" - the burning of fossil fuels without using technology to capture the resulting CO2 emissions - to achieve net zero in energy systems by 2050 at the latest.

On coal, the countries agreed to prioritize "concrete and timely steps" towards accelerating the phase-out of "domestic, unabated coal power generation", as a part of a commitment last year to achieve at least a "predominantly" decarbonized power sector by 2035.

"The solar and wind commitments are huge statements to the importance that they will rely on the energy superpowers of solar and wind in order to phase out fossil fuels," said Dave Jones, who is head of data insights at energy think tank Ember.

"Hopefully this will provide a challenge to Japan, for which offshore wind is the missing part of the jigsaw that could see its power sector decarbonise much quicker than it thought possible."

Host country Japan, which depends on imports for nearly all its energy needs, wants to keep liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a transition fuel for at least 10 to 15 years.